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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/05/2017
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: RED MOSQUE -- SITREP 16:00 LOCAL

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 2908
 1B. ISLAMABAD 2905
 1C. ISLAMABAD 2829
 1D. ISLAMABAD 2468
 1E. ISLAMABAD 2334
 1F. ISLAMABAD 2270
 1G. ISLAMABAD 1846
 1H. ISLAMABAD 1688
 1I. ISLAMABAD 1647

1. (SBU) Summary: Lal Masjid leader mullah Abdul Aziz was arrested July 4 while trying to escape disguised as a woman in a burqa. Pakistan Army Rangers estimate close to a thousand people have surrendered from the mosque. Abdur Rashid Ghazi, the remaining mullah in the mosque, reaffirmed his commitment to facing down the government. End Summary.

2. (SBU) As of 16:30 local time, the Pakistan Army had not launched a major assault against the mosque amid continuing surrenders of occupants (see reftels). The Director General of Operations for the Punjab Rangers today announced 578 male and 374 female mosque occupants had surrendered since July 3; he further stated approximately 400 militants remained in the compound. Media estimates of surrender numbers and remaining mosque occupants were significantly higher. Authorities relaxed a curfew imposed in the general area of Lal Masjid from 1:30 to 3:30 PM; this did not apply to the immediate vicinity of the mosque, which remains off-limits. Estimates of the death toll ranged from 17 to 25. American staff with residences near the mosque were moved yesterday and will remain temporarily housed with colleagues until the situation is resolved.

3. (SBU) Post confirms Lal Masjid leader mullah Abdul Aziz was arrested the night of July 4 while trying to escape the mosque compound disguised as a woman in a burqa. During an interview on a government sponsored television channel, Aziz, still in his burqa, said the militants could not repel the government's troops. Aziz' brother Abdur Rashid Ghazi remained in control of Lal Masjid and publicly reaffirmed the mosque's commitment to resisting a government attack. Parliamentarian and leader of the opposition Fazlur Rehman's attempts to broker a peace deal fell through when Ghazi refused to unconditionally surrender.

4. (U) Pakistan Army helicopters have been periodically used

as a show of force over the Red Mosque since approximately 18:30 July 4. Sporadic exchanges of gunfire between militants and authorities continue to occur infrequently.

15. (SBU) Comment: Despite the ongoing situation at the Red Mosque, it is business-as-usual throughout the rest of Islamabad. All Mission operations are functioning normally; all staff are accounted for; and the overall mood in the city is guarded but calm. Embassy staff observed some Ranger unit convoys departing the city this morning. We will continue to monitor the situation closely. End Comment.

PATTERSON